

NARENDER KHAJURIA

The sculpture reproduced on the end paper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From : Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

Makers Of Indian Literature

NARENDER KHAJURIA

By
Nilamber Dev Sharma



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

It was in November 1959 that I first heard about Narender Khajuria and his first collection of short stories in Dogri entitled *Kole Diyan Leekaran*. I acquired a copy of the same and read all the stories. Some of the stories, particularly 'Din Bar' and 'Ki Phull Bani Gey Angare' made a deep impression on me. And then Narender's *Shano*, *As Bhag Jagane Ale Aan* and *Rochack Kahaniyan* appeared one after the other, which made Narender a prominent figure in Dogri literature.

We came to know each other during 1961-63 when I was writing my book *An Introduction to Modern Dogri Literature*, during 1961-63, but we became rather friendly when Narender joined the Cultural Academy as Editor, Hindi Sheeraza in 1964. I was the Deputy Secretary of the Academy at that time, and in May 1966, I became its Secretary. There were initially some moments when I felt that he wasn't very sure about his relations with me—should he treat me as a writer/critic or as his boss? But I gave him the respect due to him as a major writer of Dogri and Hindi. I was impressed by his zeal and tireless efforts to create more literature in Dogri and bring out good issues of Hindi Sheeraza, his courtesy and dedication to work.

Narender had many qualities of head and heart, although he had, like any other human being, his failings. In this monograph, I have given some details of his personal life, but my main concern here has been only with those details which shaped him as a creative artist and writer of Dogri literature.

Though the Monograph is meant for general readers, I have given some footnotes so that they can prove useful to the specialists among them.

Nilamber Dev Sharma

Place : Jammu

Dated : 19-7-1990

LIFE AND BACKGROUND

Narender Khajuria, the youngest of eight children of Gauri Shankar and Amar Dei, was born on January 16, 1933. Narender's ancestors originally hailed from village 'Sunjama' a few kilometres from the famous Bahu Fort and the Mahakali temple in Jammu. Later on, they moved to village Madi, about four kilometres to the North - East of the town of Reasi in the Jammu and Kashmir state.

Narender's father, Gauri Shanker, was the first youth of Madi village to give up his ancestral profession of Purohits (priests) to become a Vaidya. He left Madi and came to Jammu to stay with his uncle, Vishveshwar who was a great scholar of Sanskrit and the court astrologer. Gauri Shanker studied Ayurveda under Vishveshwar Jyotshi and later, Vishveshwar got him a job at the government dispensary.

Gauri Shanker later purchased a piece of land at Haveli Begum (now Karan Nagar) and settled there with his family. Soon he acquired some reputation as a competent Vaidya of the city. Narender's mother, Amar Dei was a simple-hearted lady who kept herself busy in her daily chores. Narender was only five when his father retired from Government service and the large family was faced with acute financial difficulties.

The financial crunch at the age of seven, when he lost his mother, a sister and a sister-in-law in quick succession, caused extreme trauma to the child. Narender, who started withdrawing from the family, now concentrated on his studies and did well. But in 1948, Narender joined Shri Ranbir High School. However he drifted into the undesirable company of boys from well - to - do families who were not serious about studies and he too lost interest in them. As a result he could not get through his Matriculation even after three attempts. His relations with his elder brother and guardian Ram Nath Shastri had also deteriorated to the point where both started avoiding each other.

It was a period of great stress to get out of it. Narender dropped out of school, distanced himself from his companions in school and decided to take up some job. He started his career as a sales boy with a cigarette company in 1952.

Riding an old ramshackle bicycle borrowed from his brother, he did his rounds, from street to street and shop to shop, meeting all kinds of people, encountering all sorts of things in the world of petty shop-keeping, and learning about the serpentine topography of the narrow lanes and bye-lanes of the city of Jammu. After a two-year stint as a sales boy, he joined the Army canteen at Nagrota, a military camp about 10 km away from Jammu on the Jammu-Srinagar highway, as a canteen assistant on a regular salary of Rs.90/- per month and free board and lodging. The bookstall in the canteen provided him an opportunity to read magazines and books and he read avidly the novels of Premchand, Sharat Chandra Chatterji and Maxim Gorky in Hindi translation. The reading habit inculcated here made him interested in Hindi literature and he started preparing himself for the Hindi honours examination, Prabhakar which he cleared in 1956 with 70% marks. The same year he changed his job and became a school teacher with the help and influence of his eldest brother, Vishwa Nath Khajuria, who had a good reputation as a school teacher in the State Education Department and good rapport with the Inspector of Schools. He was posted to a school in a remote hilly place called Chowki Jandrodh, some eight kilometres away from Ram Nagar town in the interior of Jammu hills.

Apprenticeship

The period of four-odd years when Narender served as a sales boy with a cigarette company and a sales assistant in the Army canteen can be termed as the period of his apprenticeship in the school of practical living. He had saved some money and had some financial means. He had learnt to be on his own which meant development of inner resources, some self-confidence, some inner strength. Posting to a small remote village, away from the city where he had lived all these years, was both a challenge and an opportunity and Narender took it in the right spirit. He opened himself to the beauty of nature around and the simple life of the village folk and allowed his latent literary talent to blossom. Nature

was bountiful—high mountains, green forests and meadows, cool watersprings and fresh air-filled environment. People were simple and honest but extremely poor, caught in the clutches of clever money-lenders, shopkeepers and landlords, ruthlessly exploited and helpless. He was touched by their total acceptance of their condition as *Parameshwar Di Karni* (God's will). The poorer and more downtrodden and low in social hierarchy the people, the more burdened and deprived, exploited and miserable they were. The situation jolted him and he set about describing what he saw—the setting of nature, the characters, the relationships between the haves and have-nots, the grinding struggle for existence, the quirks of destiny. He found the characters of his fiction like Bhagan and Murku, Faqir Chand and Premu, Gulaboo and Meeru, Shano and Shanker, the Bajias and Shahs here in the village of Chowki Jandrodh and the adjoining areas. He also found here his style of portraying these characters and their peculiar situations.

Years of Creativity

1957 and 1958 were fruitful years in the creative activity of Narender. Six of the short stories written by him during this period were published by Dogri Sanstha, Jammu in 1959, in the form of a book called *Kole Diyan Leekaran* (Charcoal Lines). The book was well received. Its characters, situations, language and style drew favourable comments. While at Chowki Jandrodh, he wrote a novelette under the title *Shano* and published it in 1961 when he had joined as a teacher in Sri Ranbir High School, Jammu. The same year, he published the first collection of one-act plays for children in Dogri called '*As Bhag Jagane Ale-Aan*', (we are the makers of our own destiny). This was the first Dogri publication which won the Jammu & Kashmir Cultural Academy Award in 1962.

Narender had written in three different genres—short story, novel and drama. But he was not resting on his laurels.

In 1964, Narender was selected as the Editor for Hindi Sheeraza. He joined the Cultural Academy after resigning from the Education Department. In the Academy, he came in contact with a large number of authors in Dogri, Hindi, Urdu and Panjabi and painters and artistes. His artistic genius received a more congenial environment there, and he started writing more and more in Dogri and Hindi with regularity. He published a collection of his Dogri

short stories for children *Rochak Kahanian* (Interesting Tales), a full-length play *Rasta, Kante Aur Hath* in Hindi, a collection of short stories in Hindi, entitled *Raste Mein*. He also wrote a number of one-act and radio plays in Dogri and Hindi. Some of them were published and others broadcast over Jammu Radio Station. A full-length play in Dogri *Dhaundiyan Kandhaan* (Crumbling Walls), and about 30 poems were also written by Narender Khajuria during this period. *Dhaundiyan Kandhaan*, the collection of poems entitled *Narender Darpan* as also a collection of Narender's one-act plays *Apne Paraye*, were published by the Dogri Sanstha after his death. Both *Rasta, Kante Aur Hath* and *Dhaundiyan Kandhaan* won the Cultural Academy awards as the best play scripts.

Narender also wrote the script for the first Dogri film in 1965 entitled *Gallan Hoeyan Beetiyan* (Once it so happened). The story was based on Narender's one-act play 'Pyasi Dharati'.

In 1967, *Neela Ambar, Kale Badal*, was published. It is a collection of his fifteen Dogri short stories. It won a posthumous award, and the first award for any Dogri book, given by the Sahitya Akademi, in the year 1970.

Narender was married in 1963 to Lalita of Painthal, a small town in Duggar wherefrom Narender's mother had hailed. Lalita, a simple, homely girl, dutiful and affectionate, gave Narender not only stability of life but also passive support in his literary pursuits. In the course of next six years, Narender became the father of 3 children, a daughter and two sons. This made him conscious of his duties as a parent and he tried to get some additional income by writing for journals and the Jammu Radio. He also built his own house during this period and rented out a part of it. He was observed with making sufficient provision for his family and towards that end he took out an insurance policy on his own life and another policy for the marriage of his daughter.

Narender was a healthy, handsome young man, about 5' 8" tall, with a luxuriant growth of black hair, black eyes with thick eyebrows, large ears, pointed nose and full lips. But one could discern traces of melancholy in his loud guffaws. He was a conscientious teacher and he respected the teaching profession. He was by nature a sympathetic person and would help needy

students in buying books and exercise books by paying from his own pocket. He loved good food, was almost a glutton and smoked regularly and drank occasionally. He was a good friend and loved to entertain friends at his residence. He was a good conversationalist, a ready wit and his laughter was infectious. He liked to encourage young writers, whether they wrote in Dogri or Hindi, although Dogri was his first love.

His end came suddenly and unexpectedly. He was in his 37th year and looked healthy and stout. On the 25th April, 1970, he was taken ill and removed to the local hospital. His pancreas had stopped functioning and his blood pressure was abnormal and it was feared that his kidneys and other vital organs would stop functioning. Attempts of the doctor to ameliorate his condition did not succeed. He was discharged from the hospital on the 28th April and soon after he was brought to his residence, he breathed his last.

The news of Narender's death spread like wild fire in the city of Jammu. It was broadcast over the Radio and appeared as a news item in local and national newspapers the next day. His death was mourned by individuals, associations, literary and cultural organisations in Jammu, adjoining towns, tehsil head-quarters and at Srinagar.

When an author of Narender's eminence dies so young and at the peak of his glory, it is quite customary for the Governor or the Chief Minister to send messages of condolence. The then Governor, Shri Bhagwan Sahay and the then Chief Minister, Shri G.M. Sadiq, men of learning and goodwill, also sent their condolence messages even though they did not know Narender personally nor had they any acquaintance with his literary works. Dr. Karan Singh, at that time a Union Minister, however, knew Narender personally and he too condoled Narender's death. Many other important leaders in the Govt. and political parties sent messages of condolence. Meetings of writers and artists were held in which homage was paid to Narender. The wave of shock was so wide and spontaneous that the writers of different languages in the State and of Hindi and Dogri outside sent their comments in writing which were later published in the form of special Numbers of Dogri magazine *Nami Chetana* brought out by the Dogri

Sanstha¹, and Sheeraza Dogri published by the State Cultural Academy².

Poets vexed sentimental and showered effusive praises on the writer in various condolence meetings. Ram Lal Sharma, an elderly poet, in his elegy entitled " 0 28 April Sattar" called the hour of Narender's death "an hour heavier than the weight of centuries," Padma Sachdev and Yash Sharma said that with his passing, Dogri short story was dead. The consensus, shorn of sentiment, however, was that Narender Khajuria had made a significant contribution to Dogri literature and carved out a place for himself in its historical development.

1. Narender Smarika - April 1971

2. Narender Smriti Ank - March 1972

SHORT STORIES

Narender's first collection of Dogri Short stories published in 1959 under the title *Kole Diyan Leekaran* contained six short stories. Narender published three more collections of his short stories. *Rochak Kahaniyan* and *Neela Ambar, Kale Badal*, written in Dogri and *Raste Mein* (on the wayside) in Hindi. The majority of his stories in *Raste Mein* are translations of some of his short stories in *Kole Diyan Leekaran* and *Neela Ambar, Kale Badal* and a few are adaptations from Dogri Folk Tales.

All the stories of *Kole Diyan Leekaran* deal with life in the hill areas of Jammu region which Narender had seen and studied from close quarters. They deal with a society which is still dominated by the feudal elements, although one can also discern in them some signs of change which promise of better days to come. But the dominant note in these stories is not that of change for the better, but of the oppression of the poor and the down-trodden at the hands of the *bajhias* (landlords) and the 'shahs' (money lenders) of the rural areas, particularly the areas of Ramnagar Tehsil.

In 'Kole Diyan Leekaran', the old parents of a young girl sell her away to Shanker, a soldier for Rs.300/- although she has been promised to be sold to a 'hawaldar'. It turns out that the Havadar had arranged to buy the girl for Shanker so that he could build a home and lead a family life. The parents are the least bothered about the feelings of their daughter; their only concern is how to get more money.

'Dharti Di Beti' (Daughter of the soil) deals with a married woman whose husband is serving away from home. She leaves her two sons with her mother-in-law and goes to the city in order to earn money and get her mortgaged piece of land retrieved from the money-lender.

In 'Hasde Basde Lok' (well-to-do-people), the girl from the village feels miserable because of the taunts of her mother-in-law and sister-in-law since her widowed mother cannot send her costly presents as the other girls from the city, married in the same family,

get from their parents. But she has a reason to be happy,— her husband, in spite of his mother's attitude towards his wife, still loves her. 'Ki Phull Bani Gey Angare' depicts the story of Fakiroo, a bright student who wants to study further, but whose academic career is cut short because he has to work in the money-lender's house in return for the unpaid amount borrowed from the money-lender by his father. 'Din Bar' (the Death Anniversary) is the story of a widow Bhagan who works for the money-lender throughout her life in order to pay back the debt and when she dies, her young son too has to serve the money-lender because the debt still remains unpaid. 'Parmeshre Di Karni' (God's will) is the story of the low-caste Gulabu, a teacher, who struggles against the society of the high-caste and the rich. He dies, dashing the hopes of his father, but he lives in the hearts of some of his pupils.

The stories are interesting, though there are shortcomings in the form of absence of locale in 'Dharti Di Beti', contriving of the situation in 'Kole Diyan Leekaran,' sentimentalism in 'Hasde Basde Lok'. There is also a temptation on the part of the author to use similes and metaphors, even at the cost of slowing down the natural growth and movement of the stories. Sometimes, he appears to be like a child who somehow wants to be seen in a photograph even when his presence might detract from the total effect of the photograph. He intrudes, as it were, into the stories with his own ideas and notions, in order to 'educate' his readers. This becomes a serious defect and interferes with the inner structure of his creations.

But to say this is not to deny the intrinsic merit of the stories of '*Kole Diyan Leekaran*', that is, the creative use of Dogri language. Some of the similes, metaphors and proverbs are used with a telling effect. His satire has the sharpness and surprise of a rapier thrust. He is an excellent creator of the rural atmosphere whether it is the scene in the fields, in the dark room of a house or outside the shop of a money-lender. But the best part of *Kole Diyan Leekaran* are the two stories 'Din Bar' and 'Ki Phull Bani Gey Angare'. 'Din Bar' ... is an impressive story of the hilly areas of Jammu, which shows how local landlords and money-lenders, who are out-wardly very generous and polite, go all out to have their pound of flesh. Narender lashes vehemently at the hypocrisy and the inhuman brutes of the villages who enjoy a high social status and who have

prospered on the misery of other innocent villagers. The effect of the cruelty of the *Bajhiya* (landlord) is enhanced on account of the utter simplicity of his victims who are ever so grateful for his 'kindness' and their honest nature and helplessness. As a depiction of this aspect of life in the hilly areas, 'Din Bar' is first rate. One does not read the story, one lives those moments. The indignation of the writer, though described in a suppressed manner, powerfully affects the reader, and one asks as to when the days of the Bajhiyas (landlords) who torment and trample Bhagans and Murkus (the victims of Bajhiya) will be over. It is also a powerful satire on the society which not only tolerates but becomes an instrument of such tyranny and oppression, an indictment of the political parties which preach equality and social justice but do nothing about it.

The artistic use of Dogri language is particularly charming and effective in the rich descriptions of scenes between Bhagan and Sunitu, and Bhagan and her son, the dialogue between Bhagan and village revenue official, the patwari.

In 'Ki Phull Bani Gey Angare', Narender shows his narrative skill and mastery over the use of language as a medium of conveying feelings and ideas in an effective manner. Faqir Chand, the young hero of the story, is one of the many pupils of Narender who relives in his pages. The atmosphere of the class room is convincingly recaptured, the children with all their innocent talk, their prompt answers, their desires and ambitions are there before us. There is a mild irony in the dialogues: the teacher gives education to his students, but whereas they become big leaders, officers and ministers, a teacher still remains a teacher, and whereas students are anxious to become every-thing, nobody wants to become a teacher.

The story of Faqir Chand is the story of many children whose parents live and die under debt, and who toil hard to change this system and they cannot but become a prey to this system. The story has a familiar theme, the one which the reader has already come across in Narender's 'Din Bar'. There the young child is made over to the landlord by his mother in order to pay off the interest on the borrowed amount; here the father who has an ailing wife, has to force his son, against his wishes, to serve the shop-keeper because he is his loanee.

While the stories of *Kole Diyan Leekaran* show up Narender Khajuria as a skilful story teller and an inimitable prose stylist, they also suffer from weaknesses of frequent repetition, poor plot structuring, a tendency to stereotype the characters and didactic sentiment.

Two of his stories which do not form part of any book and appeared in Dogri literary journals only, are 'Khillan Chhole' (fried rice and gram) and 'Dhoonyen Ala Andar' (smoke-filled interior.)

'Khillan Chhole', deals with the domestic problems, the problem of poverty and the inability of the parents to marry their young daughter to a suitable groom.

'Dhoonyen Ala Andar' is the story of an old woman, Devkoo. She was married to an old man, suffering from asthma, when she was a very young girl. He died after some years, but after his death, she led a lonely life, devoid of happiness. She did not marry again because she wanted her dead body to be carried out of her house where she had come as a wedded wife.

Her house is situated by the side of a rivulet. She treats it as her companion and shares her thoughts of sorrow and anger with it. She also tries to guard the honour of the village by preventing the elopement of young girls with their lovers. But there is a limit to everything. On one rainy day, she gives shelter to a young and beautiful girl, Chhallo, who is eloping with her lover because otherwise she would be married to the Zaildar, an old and oft-married man, by her parents. Though Devkoo is against elopement in principle but on seeing Chhallo, she is reminded of her own youthful days, and the injustice meted out to her by marrying her to a very old man. She does not wish that Chhallo should meet the same fate, and therefore, when her relatives enquire from Devkoo about Chhallo, she flatly denies her presence and allows Chhallo to elope with and marry the man of her own choice.

The story vividly captures the atmosphere of cold and wintery night, which is enhanced by the smoke in Devkoo's room. The smoke is also symbolic because it seems to have enveloped the minds and souls of the elders of her village who sanction the evil practice of ill-matched marriages.

In *Neela Amber, Kale Badal*, (The Blue Sky and the dark clouds), Narender seems to have developed greater social awareness and artistic maturity. He handles his themes with a fuller grasp over details and psychological insight although 'Natak Da Hero', 'Dhage Te Chattan,' 'Ma Tu Lori Ga', and 'Painchi Partoey Par' suffer from surfeit of sentimentalism. The first three deal with patriotic themes, and the last is about the theme of sacrifice for one's beloved, and is full of nostalgia. To an extent, this sentimentalism is present even in his story 'Neela Ambar Kale Badal', but it is in the treatment of the theme rather than in the theme itself.

'Kastu Da Kala Tittar' deals in a powerful style, with the barrenness in Kastu's life, who has lost her husband, her only young child and has faced the heart-rending situations and the jibes and jeers of the village-folk and particularly those of Jagtu Baroala who is against her because she refused to surrender to his lustful approaches. To satisfy her motherly instincts, she keeps a partridge as a pet and treats him as if he were carrying the soul of her dead child in him. But even he deceives her and flies free of the cage, leaving her completely lost and forlorn.

'Inami Kahani' is a good-humoured satire. Premu, who was once a student of the teacher-turned writer loses his father. He goes to Hardiwar to perform the religious rites of his dead father and on return from there, takes up a job of a vendor in a Cinema hall. The writer who has won an award on a story written with Premu as its hero, suddenly meets Premu in the Cinema hall. Premu serves the teacher and his friends tea during the interval and refuses to accept money because "a teacher's position is higher than that of one's father even". The writer is at once made conscious of Premu's greatness and of his own pettiness for having used Premu only as a character in his story and to win award for it and not because he sincerely felt for Premu's hardship and misery.

'Tk Pattar Pattajhar Da', though based on a Dogri folk-tale, exposes the unethical behaviour of an unemployed educated youth, who for a small consideration, becomes a tool in the hands of certain unscrupulous persons and acts as a bride - groom in place of an ugly one-eyed youth and becomes instrumental in the undoing of a beautiful young girl.

'Kavita Da Ant' is the story of a talented girl Kavita who writes poetry but whose poems and the fame which comes after the recitation of those poems are monopolised by her selfish and untalented husband. And his 'Poetry' comes to an end when his Kavita is buried under the sacks of salt stacked for black-marketing by her father-in-law.

'Ik Samhal' is a delicate and tenderly-drawn picture of Nani (a grandmother), an orthodox lady with prejudices against the lower castes, but who nurses with loving care the wounds of a Mahasha—an 'untouchable' child.

'Sach Jehra Tramen De Paten Par Nein Lakhoa' is the story of the blind 'Tai' and her son, Narain Dutt. Her husband's grand-father had been given copper-plates by the Raja Sahib in recognition of his status as the Raj Purohit. But she felt that her son was bringing disgrace to his family by marrying a woman, already married and having two children from her earlier marriage, and belonging to an inferior caste. But when Tai's daughter-in-law actually comes to her house, all the dreams and the songs kept unsung in Tai's heart, become alive and she involuntarily starts singing the songs sung on marriage, and the arrival of the palanquin, carrying the bride to her husband's house.

'Apna Apna Dharm' deals with the two sets of people and their different standards and behaviour, one for themselves and the other for others.

'Saddro Dai' is the story of a midwife who has brought happiness to women by helping them in the delivery of their children, but who has been singularly unhappy in the absence of any child of her own. She, therefore, kidnaps a small girl. In the process of bringing her up, Saddro Dai is arrested by the police.

Narender has created, in the stories of this collection, some memorable characters like Kastu, Premu, Saddro Dai, the hero of 'Ik Pattar ...' the blind Tai of 'Sach Jehra...' the Nani of 'Ik Samhal'. Along with such characters as Faqir Chand, Bhagan and Murku, Rami, Meeru chamiyar and Gulabu of '*Kole Diyan Leekaran*', Shano, Bajhiyas and Mohna of *Shano*, they form a part of a rich portrait gallery from the hills of Duggar.

Narender in the present selection has also made skilful use of Dogri prose. The turns and phrases, humour and satire, and figures of speech embellish his prose and enhance the literary value of these stories.

There is amusing irony and telling social satire in quite a few of his stories. In 'Ki Phull Bari Gey Angarey' when the teacher tells his students about the importance of milk, fruit, cheese, eggs and fish in one's diet, a child remarks innocently, 'only Sahibs and not ordinary men can eat so many things.' He means to say that so many items of nutritious food in one's diet cannot be easily digested. It also cleverly brings out the irony in the situation. Where is equality of opportunity, and good and nutritious food for all? In 'Din Bar', Bhagan's remarks to the political workers are a clever satire on the present-day political set-up: 'You have come to save us, why have you started distributing loaves and fishes among yourselves? Look at us. We are sinking into abysmal depths'. In 'Kavita Da Ant', the Shah tells his son, 'one should stock the commodities for which the demand has grown, whether that is salt or poetry! And 'Ganesh would demand from his wife poems with the same authority as though he were asking her for an underwear, a handkerchief or a tumbler of water'. In 'Kastu Da Kala Tittar: 'The world of Kastu is not round but long, which has turns, turns and turns again or, 'The ice of Kastu's memories had started melting again!'

Though Narender created many memorable situations and characters in his inimitable style, he felt that his best was yet to come. In his own words: 'I like those of my stories which I have not yet penned down-whose bare outlines I have jotted down in my diary. I am not yet finding myself competent enough to write them. Similarly, I am fond of those characters who have not yet been made prisoners of my pen'.¹

Narender wrote two more short stories after the publication of his second collection, entitled 'Bakkhariyan Bakkhriyan Jeebhan' (Different Tongues) and 'Ikk Kahani Panj Sirlekh' (One story, five captions), the last one having been written only a fortnight before his death and read before the delegates to the All India Dogri Writers conference on April 13, 1970. This story was

1. See Kinna Sach, Kinna Jhooth in Neela Ambar, Kale Badal

inspired by a remark of a poet, Sagar Palampuri to the effect that Narender Khajuria was the Emperor of Dogri fiction (Galpa Samrat). It is an unconventional story and is remarkable for its tongue-in-cheek approach to the subject, and its sharp satire on the so-called *linguists* and literary critics.

In 'Bakkhriyan Bakkhriyan Jeeban', Narender exposes the hypocrisy which has become a second nature with many people working in different walks of life. Even the school teachers and Head Masters who are expected to act as models of correct and sober behaviour start liking and practising flattery. They not only do not support a teacher of integrity but they become hostile to him because he refuses to toe their line. And when a teacher refuses to oblige the Head Master of the school, he is transferred to a far-off place and yet he speaks very highly of the teacher in his fare-well function.

As mentioned earlier, *Raste Mein* is a collection of Narender's short stories in Hindi. Out of its 13 stories, ten are translations of his Dogri short stories, one is based on a Dogri folk tale and stories 'Phool Bane Angare' and 'Ek Nai Nirali Duniya' seem to be original in Hindi. The translations of Dogri short stories have been done competently, and they recapture the spirit of their originals. Sometimes, unconsciously, some Dogri expressions creep in, but they are not too many.

'Raka' is based on a Dogri Folk-tale, but its end has been changed. In the Dogri folk-tale, the prince kills the princess who is eloping with him. In 'Raka' the hero, Manohar deserts Raka without verifying the facts and without caring for Raka's feelings and consequences of his own desertion of Raka. The treatment and the style lend it a modern touch, some-what influenced by films.

'Ek Nai Nirali Duniya' is almost a fantasy with an improbable theme. It is rather a weak story, but Narender has made use of some beautiful similes, and metaphors.

'Phool Bane Angare' is a story of romantic yearnings and nostalgic, though painful memories. The growing romance between the hero and Halima, his maternal uncle's daughter, is portrayed in a delicate and sensitive manner. It is written in an effective style and simple Hindi. There are traces of Narender's

peculiar humour—irony and satire—expressed in a low-key style, with a touch of sympathy and understanding.

The number of short stories written by Narender in Dogri is not very large when compared to some prolific short story writers. Just 25 stories. Out of these, 'Din Bar', 'Ki Phull Bani Gey Angare,' 'Kastu Da Kala Tittar' 'Inami Kahani,' 'Tk Pattar Pattajhar Da', and 'Dooyen Ala Ander' are his best short stories and among the best in Dogri.

NOVEL

Narender wrote only one novel, one of the first three Dogri novels that appeared almost simultaneously during 1960: *Shano* by Narender Khajuria, *Dharan Te Dhuran* by Madan Mohan Sharma and *Har, Beri Te Pattan* by Ved Rahi. When Narender started writing his novel, he was still working as a teacher in Chowki Jandrodh of Ramnagar Tehsil. The life in the hills as Narender saw and experienced was not idyllic in nature, as one would feel after reading Mool Raj Mehta's famous Dogri song: 'Jeena Paharen Da Jeena' (life in the hill areas is indeed worth-living). It was a mixed fair. If nature is beautiful and kind, man is man's worst enemy there. He deprives his own fellow-beings of what is their due. And even though legally the feudal system and the institution of Sahukari (Money-lending) were abolished in the Jammu and Kashmir state by the end of nineteen forties, their hold continued in the urban areas till the end of the seventies, and it continues in the hill areas even now. It was very strong during the days when Narender was posted there. He had seen with his own eyes how the 'Bajhiyas' and Shahs (landlords and sahu-kars) exercised their control over the economically and socially backward sections of society; their belongings and their children were all meant for the 'Bajhiyas'. Anyone who borrowed even small amounts from the Sahukar was unable to liquidate the debt even after paying the interest many times over the principal. Being uneducated and God-fearing and placed as they were in the lower rungs of the social set-up, their poverty, illiteracy and timidity were exploited to the full by the Sahukar. And the system of bonded labour was very much alive and practised.

The afore-mentioned three novels deal with the life and circumstances in the rural areas. Taken as a whole, they present a broad and vivid picture of our villages and bring us face to face with many an ugly reality of our social set-up. But whereas Narender's emphasis is more on the socio-economic aspects, that of Madan Mohan is on socio-political; Ved Rahi's emphasis is more on the social than on the political or economic aspects.

Narender with his idealism and zeal for social reform, weaves in his novel an atmosphere of constructive efforts towards rural uplift and social awakening. Shanker, the main male character in the novel, is an ex-service man. Courage and the spirit of sacrifice are his main assets but he loses his one leg while trying to save a young child from an incoming train. This incident becomes the cause of all his ensuing troubles. Shanker, however, does not regret his action. Moreover, Shano who is full of love and affection, and acts as a devoted wife, always gives him solace and support. She has almost an inexhaustible reserve of courage which never allows Shanker's spirits to droop.

Shano is a tireless worker. Instead of feeling dejected, she starts stitching clothes and with the money she earns, she plans to raise an orchard over their vacant piece of land. It is at this stage that the villainous Bajhiyas, Mehto Baji and Sarnu Shah make their entry. True to their nature and profession, they cannot tolerate that anybody should stand on his/her own feet and lead a life of honour and dignity, least of all a woman. They so contrive that Shano's sewing machine, her only source of income and the orchard which could stand them in good stead, are taken away from them. Their house is also set on fire by the scheming Metho Baji and Sarnu Shah. Vanquished but not broken, Shano fights poverty and hunger by working for others and doing odd jobs. Shah and Baji then scheme to attract Shanker to bad company, and through their agents, make him drink. They also try to make Shanker suspect his wife Shano, but Shano is too clever for them all. She tackles the situation with tact and understanding, weans Shanker away from the evil company and drinking habit. But their enemies do not sit still; they make it impossible for Shano and Shanker to live in the village.

Shano and Shanker leave the village with their son. They meet a contractor whose daughter had been saved by Shanker but they are too proud to remind him about this. They both start working on daily wages as road-builders, save sufficient money and return to their village to retrieve their orchard from the sahuکار.

Shano appears to be an elaboration of Narender's two stories written and published earlier in his collection *Kole Diyan Leekaran*: 'Din Bar' and 'Dharti Di Beti'. The situations and the atmosphere, and even the major characters strike the reader of these stories as

deja vu with the result that we witness in Shano the strength and the weakness which we have already witnessed in these stories. Shano is part Bhagan and part Rami. They are, as it were, inherent in the very structure of the novel. Apart from treating the subject in an idealistic manner, there is also a strong element of sentimentalism that runs throughout the novel.

When it comes to lashing at fraud and exposing the shams of our society, his pen moves with skill and gusto; but when it comes to finding solutions, his approach becomes rather wobbly. That's why he is most successful when he describes Shanker in a defiant mood, although that defiance is but rarely to be seen in him. His Shano, though the leading character of the novel, looks more like a saintly woman who has been depicted with all the virtues and no weaknesses, who has overcome all her passions and anger, and who may be able to win many a sympathiser, but who seldom moves her readers. There is something cold in her attitude towards life, and her fortitude is sometimes annoying. But Narender is at his best when he grapples with his villains: they become independent entities and assume a volition of their own. His language becomes muscular and a powerful vehicle to express his feelings. These characters appear realistic, drawn from first hand experience of life, while characters like Shano and Shanker look idealised, not to be found in real life. And the solutions which Narender suggests in his novel are what an idealist yearns for in his life, but they are not feasible because they do not simply happen. The novel ends on a very optimistic note: 'All was clear hence-forth' (Batt Chanain Hi). This is an example of Narender's mastery over his prose, but it also shows his smug and complacent belief that things were for the better after that. It is this end which leaves Shano's readers dissatisfied, for they know that the things are not so smooth even now, and it is not all moonlight and glow, the paths are still full of dim, dark patches, though not completely unrelieved by light and hope.

But to say this is not to detract from the novel's merits. The faults of locale in the novel—the geographical boundaries are not clearly defined: one vaguely guesses about the New Road as the Udampur-Dhar Road, but the reader is helped by his own intelligence rather than by Narender's descriptions — are a common feature of his short stories as well. And yet the story is

readable. One is quite prepared at times for 'the willing suspension of disbelief,' and is drawn by the fast current of Narender's prose. There is an economy of expression here which is very refreshing. He never errs on the side of garrulity. The Budhoo (fool) in Shano reminds us of poor Tom in King Lear. The philosophy of poor Tom is similar to that of Budhoo in *Shano*. He saves Shanker from ruining himself by drinking just as Poor Tom saves Gloucester from leaping unto his death.

Shano, though sufficiently readable, is not a very well-made novel. His idealism, his desire to provide solutions to all the vexing problems of life and society, cramp his style and inhibit him from depicting life realistically in all its aspects.

PLAYS

After trying his hand in writing short stories and novel *Shano* in Dogri, Narender directed his attention to writing plays. He was aware of the tremendous potentialities of the stage and stage-plays, both as a source of entertainment and instruction. Apart from creating a direct impact on the audience, when the play is staged, it also moves the readers when they see it in print provided it is a good piece of literature. But the element of instruction should not be too obtrusive; it should appear to be an integral part of the whole play.

Narender made full use of this potential in his first collection of children's plays *As Bhag Jagane Ale Aan* (discussed separately). When he wrote his *As Bhag Jagane Aan*, he was a school teacher in a remote village of Jammu Division. The students or the general public there were not aware of the advances made in the stage-plays or in the stage-craft. They were without any source of entertainment and any play would be good enough for them. They had not seen even *Ram Leela* or *Ras Leela*. And, therefore, when the plays contained in *As Bhag Jagane Ale Aan* were staged before them, it was a novel experience for them. Also, because the characters and situations were familiar to them, they became aware of the scope of entertainment and education which dramatic performances and dramatic literature could provide to them.

Narender joined the Cultural Academy in 1964. By the second half of the sixties, the Academy had started organising Drama Competitions and plays-script competitions. Good performances won prizes for the participants and the clubs which staged those plays. Play-wrights also won prizes for their good scripts. This provided an incentive to Narender Khajuria to write plays in the new context and for the urban audiences which were more sophisticated and discriminating than the rural folk for whom he had written his earlier one-act and children's plays. Moreover, because Jammu in those days did not have a modern theatre, Gulab Bhavan which was an apology for a theatre and lacked even the

basic facilities essential for staging a good, modern play, was the only hall where plays were performed. It would take quite sometime to change the scenes and sets, thus making the audiences restive. The accoustics were far from satisfactory, and improvisation became necessary.

Narender tried to solve some of the problems by writing plays which could be staged on one set, thereby obviating the need to change the scenes and sets too often. He was a good actor and he had acted in quite a few of his own plays in Chowki Jandordh. He knew that a play was the result of collective efforts in which apart from the play-wright, the actors, the director, the make-up man, the lightman, the set and costume designers had to collaborate. With this background, he wrote the first full-length play in Hindi entitled *Rasta, Kante Aur Hath* (The hands that clear the path.) The play was staged in the Drama competition organised by the Cultural Academy and the performance won a prize.

The play seems to have been inspired partially by the Dogri play *Nama Gran* because in this play also, the authors have shown the disintegrating feudal set-up and the collective effort of the people to build a new model village, removing all obstructions which come in their way. In Narender's play, Manorath Ram represents the old decadent system, which is reinforced by his elder son, Rasia and the fraudulent Swami. And the opponents of this system are Gian, Ganga, the village Sarpanch, and Sevak Ram, the old servant of Manorath Ram.

The villagers wanted a road to be constructed which could connect their village with the main town. This would prove of immense use to the people because there would be easier means of transport and communication, their produce could be easily sent to the towns; commerce would get a fillip. But Manorath Ram, Rasia and Swami were opposed to this idea. They were in a smugglers business, and if the village were connected by a road, their 'business' would be exposed; police could arrest them.

There is a struggle between the protagonists of the new order, led by Gian, the younger son of Manorath Ram, who has returned to his village after getting a degree in Agriculture and the reactionaries and the obscurantists led by Manorath Ram and his allies like the fraudulent Swami, a criminal in reality, who helps

Manorath Ram and his son Rasia, a drunkard, to adulterate Ghee with Vanaspati and then smuggle this out of the village, making huge profits. They want to confuse and divide the villagers sometimes in the name of religion and sometimes in the name of caste. But all their evil designs are thwarted by Gian and other villagers, and their machinations defeated. The villagers succeed in constructing the road through their voluntary efforts, much to the chagrin of Manorath Ram, Rasia and the Swami.

There is a gradual development of the plot: in the first half, the protagonists of the old system seem to dominate but slowly they start getting exposed. The forces of new order now are in the ascendancy. In between, there are tense moments and dramatic situations.

The play *Rasta, Kante Aur Hath* has the elements of a successful play. It has a good plot and a fairly good theme. There is a natural development of plot, and the forces of evil, which dominate the forces of good in the beginning are ultimately defeated. The play which starts with a definite purpose is able to achieve that — the exposure and defeat of the forces of reaction and selfishness at the hands of the forces of progress and service. Though the play presents an idealised picture of Gian, Ganga, Sarpanch, Roshan Ali and Sewak Ram, and puts Swami, Rasia, Manorath Ram and their henchmen in bad light, they nevertheless appear to be men and women of flesh and blood, with their own volition and actions. They respond to the situations even though the situations are created by the author to suit his purpose.

The play has a symbolic title: *Rasta, Kante Aur Hath*. It is the evil men who scatter thorns in the path, but the good men remove them with their own hands and pave the way clear for all. The wind of change which is blowing in the entire country does not leave even the villages unaffected. And the villagers too realise their role in shaping a better future for their village and indirectly, for the entire society and the country. And they can do so by siding with the forces of progress and goodwill and by fighting the forces of reaction and darkness.

In drama, more than in any other form of literature, individuals become types, and represent certain values and characteristics. They become symbols, and that symbolism is

conveyed in different ways through their names, background or actions. It is true to an extent even in the play *Rasta, Kante Aur Hath*. Gian represents the power of knowledge and wisdom of the application of scientific knowledge for better produce and better facilities for the rural people; Ganga represents the spirit of purity and service, of doing good to others. When knowledge and selfless service combine, one can definitely hope for better days for all. Roshan Ali too represents the spirit of service and light. He saves Ganga's honour, and lights the torch of service to the villagers and of communal harmony; Sevak Ram is not only the servant of Manorath Ram, he is the servant of the people, in the cause of truth and honest living. Sarpanch is what the village head should be like, in word and deed.

Manorath Ram and his band represent the forces of evil and darkness. Manorath Ram is shown to be keen always to achieve his own aim and ambition (Manorath), whatever the means. Rasia is only fond of drinks and women: he is not concerned about others' honour, sentiments and susceptibilities, Swami is what a Swami should not be, but what some of his ilk are. His actions are the antithesis of his name and he represents the sham and hypocrisy masquerading as truthfulness, spirit of service and holiness. He always utters 'Shiv-Shambhu' to deceive the simple and credulous people, although at heart he is a 'thug' and has been a murderer. Manorath Ram, too, uses 'Ram Hi Ram' and Rasia 'Ram Kasam'. These are their pet phrases, and distinguish their characters and personalities from those of others.

Narender was essentially a writer in Dogri but he was also qualified in Hindi. Though there is a flow in the dialogues, sometimes, unconsciously perhaps, some expressions creep in which identify him as a writer of a non-Hindi speaking region. But this lends an authenticity also because it helps to establish the locale of the plot and the incidents, a field in which Narender was not particularly distinguished. Dialogues are forceful and the conflicts and contradictions of characters and situations are conveyed through them.

Narender had a definite aim in his writings. He succeeds in his aim in this play also, by entertaining people and educating them at the same time. He was passionately involved, intellectually and

artistically, in the task of social uplift. He used his literary capability in projecting those ideas through stage plays and other forms of literature.

Rasta, Kante Aur Hath provides good material for acting. In the play, which has three acts, there is a judicious division of each act, thereby contributing to the development of the plot and its denouement. This shows the maturity of Narender which he had acquired over the years as a playwright. The play has been translated into Dogri as *Nehre Raste Channan Hoye* by Kuldip Singh Jindarahia.

Narender also wrote a full-length play in Dogri entitled *Dhaundiyan Kandhan*. (The Crumbling Walls). This play too can be staged on one set, and the reasons for making it a one-set play were not different from the ones that impelled Narender to write his Hindi play *Rasta, Kante Aur Hath*. "This play also won the award in the play-script competition organised by the J&K Cultural Academy.

The title of the play *Dhaundiyan Kandhan* is symbolic. It shows our social system which was earlier dominated by feudalism, to be on its last legs; its walls are crumbling. Now this symbolism had great potentialities and one would expect Narender to make the best of his uncommon wit and satire, the power of observation and the creation of powerful characters and realistic situations as he had done earlier in many of his stories and novel *Shano*. But somehow, he does not make the right move in the play *Dhaundiyan Kandhan*. One feels that he got so much lost in contriving humorous situations that he almost forgot about the title and the main thrust. On reading the play, one realises that the walls have already collapsed, for the main proponent of the Jagirdari system, Ram Dass himself, before long, has become a convert to the new ideas and new values. And it is he who drives the last nail into the coffin of the decaying feudalistic system. Nor is there anything odious or disgusting shown about the feudalistic set up. Whatever evils or short-comings Narender describes about the Jagirdari system are present in the whole Indian Society—the greed and avarice, sticking to antiquated notions and yet looking a step higher in society. And those too are described in a lighter vein.

Narendra does not mention anything about the locale; where does all this happen? Nor do the names give any indication of the region where the incidents take place. Who are the Jagirdars and who is the Prince? An attempt has been made to create mirth by engaging three labourers and giving them instructions in the art of the waiters, but why could not the waiters be engaged from any hotel for a few days so that they could function efficiently and save Ram Dass's money?

The real 'Villain of the piece' is Maya Ram who unfortunately has been assigned a larger-than-life role in the play. His past associations with fire-brigade—he served the Department till his retirement—do not allow any freedom of action to Maya Ram or to other dramatis personae. His style and his actions are cribbed by his past and he views every person, every situation only in the context of an emergency with which one is confronted in the Fire Brigade. He does create some humour, but it appears that he is always living in the shadow of his Ustad Seva Ram so much so that even his present employer, Ram Dass, tells him at times that enough is enough and that he should think of other things than merely go on talking about Ustad Seva Ram of the Fire Brigade.

Characterisation in *Dhaundiyan Kandhan* is rather disappointing. The characters, including Ram Dass, Natwar Lal, Uma, Ajay and Maya Ram do not seem to be free agents and seem to be contrived.

The strong point of the play is the hilarity and fun which make the audience laugh. The funny situations, made more so by the clever turn and twist of the dialogues, the similes, sometimes incongruous and inappropriate, only heighten the mirth inherent in the situations. Narendra, by the time he proceeds towards the conclusion of the play, has realised that the walls of feudalism and prejudice are not only crumbling; they have already crumbled. And he need not, therefore, be too serious or earnest to give them the last blow.

The play is easy to act; it does not require much of technical skill nor more than one set which saves much time in shifting from one act to the other, and does not make the audience restive. Moreover, in some of the dialogues, one sees Narendra as a literary

artist who manipulates the resources of Dogri to prove his virtuosity.

Apart from the two full-length plays, one each in Hindi and Dogri and the short plays written in Dogri for the children and included in his *As Bhag Jagane Ale Aan*, Narender wrote a number of short plays and radio plays in Dogri and Hindi. Some of these plays were written both for the stage and the radio and were either written originally in Dogri and later translated into Hindi or vice-versa. One such play is 'Pyasi Dharti' (The parched land), which has been published alongwith another short play 'Gehari Nadia Ki Dhar' and the full length play *Rasta, Kante Aur Hath*.

'Pyasi Dharti' basically deals with the problem of reciprocal marriage (Dohri) which has been so common in Duggar, particularly its hill areas. This system has been largely responsible for many an iniquitous situation, more particularly for the women. In this system, there is the practice to marry the girl in a family and get a male (irrespective of his age, health or position) from the girl's family to marry into the family of the girl's in-laws. This system might have been a social and an economic necessity in the beginning, but with the passage of time, this system degenerated into an oppressive one, and the cause of deep frustration and ruination of many young girls. The play also deals with the problem of water for the parched land and its people.

The brother of Devki gives his sister in marriage to Haria, a handsome youth of a nearby village. But the village is without a permanent source of water. In summer there is no water left to irrigate the parched fields, or to drink even, for the villagers or their cattle. Devki's brother decides to dig a small 'Koohl' from their village to the village of Devki's husband.

The work starts on the 'Koohl', but before it is completed, Devki's younger brother Ganesh, to whom Devki's sister-in-law, Sarju is to be married, unfortunately dies. Devki's elder brother insists that Sarju now be married to their elderly uncle. This is strongly resisted by Chandu and Devki, who would never agree to give Sarju in marriage to an old man.

The relations between Devki and her brother, and the two families are ruptured for good. Devki's brother retaliates against this action of his sister by stopping the work on the 'koohl'.

When summer comes, the water famine becomes so acute that for the sake of her family and fields, Devki decides to dig the unfinished part of the *koohl*. At dead of night, when everyone in her family is asleep, she starts the work. When the water starts flowing in the direction of her husband's village, Devki's brother who did not know that it was Devki who was working on the 'Koohl' inflicts a fatal blow on her with his axe. On hearing the shriek, he realises he had done his sister to death. He repents and atones for this deadly act by allowing the water to flow into her in-laws' village, to quench their thirst and the thirst of villagers and their fields. The two families are re-united in adversity and suffering.

The plot of the play is well-structured, and the story moves to its culmination in a logical manner. In the process, he achieves a social objective. He is able to stress the point that water is the basic need of all human beings, even of fields and plants. One must use it judiciously, but it should not be denied to anyone. He also protests against the system of 'Dohri' and unequal marriages, but he feels that we can get rid of this system only if those who are most affected by it—that is, the women—decide to end it by fighting against the tyranny perpetrated by men, by their fathers, brothers or by those linked to them in any other manner.

Narender has made good use of the situations which contribute to the development of the plot. The interplay of these situations and the clash and conflict of characters articulated through powerful dialogues heighten the dramatic effect of the play. Though written both in Dogri and Hindi, Narender is more sure, and at ease in his Dogri version than in its Hindi version although, in the latter too, he exhibits his skill and hold over the language. In both, he uses figures of speech to embellish the language.

Characters are not flat; most of them are creatures of flesh and blood. They react and respond to the situations. If they speak soft words to express tender feelings, they are quite capable of speaking fiery words as when Chandu says 'Brother, Sarju is not a bottle of liquor but she is our sister'¹. Or when Devki says one cannot know

1. Pyasi Dharti, Page 122

truth from falsehood without fighting the battle of Mahabharat. But the Draupadi of today's Mahabharata is not that weak; she can beard any Duryodhan of today. Chandu, her brother-in-law too compares himself to Abhimanyu.²

Narender wrote about a dozen Radio plays each in Dogri and Hindi. He was, therefore, well-versed in the technique of Radio-play and he made a competent use of sound and music to convey what light, make-up and costumes would convey in the case of stage plays.

The other Radio play included in *Rasta, Kante Aur Hath* is *Gehri Nadiya Ki Dhar* (the flow of the deep river). This play has been written in Hindi and in this Narender has made use of the typical language of the Boat-people to depict the struggle between the forces of status quo as represented by some of the boatmen like Moti and Gangi exploited by men like Rasia — who is Phoolan's fiance — and those of change, represented by Babu and supported by persons like Phoolan, and her father and Kaki.

There are situations in the play which in some ways are parallel to those in *Rasta, Kante Aur Hath*. In the former, there is the construction of the link road to the city; in the latter it is the bridge. In both the plays, the move for change is resisted by the vested interests but initiated and strongly supported by the enlightened persons. In *Rasta, Kante Aur Hath*, Gian, Ganga, Sarpanch, Roshan and Sewak Ram support the construction of the road, and Swami, Rasia and Manorath Ram oppose the move. In 'Gehri Nadiya Ki Dhar', Babu, Phoolan, her father and Kaki support the construction of the Bridge, but Rasia, Moti, Gangu and the like oppose it. In either case, the forces of change come out victorious, but in 'Gehri Nadiya Ki Dhar', Phoolan has to sacrifice her life. May be because her marriage to the educated Babu would have appeared incongruous to some!

The play has a good theme; there is an artistic development of the plot. The situations and the characters are well-planned and well-drawn. Narender seems to have captured the speech and tone of the boat-people. The dramatic effect has been created by the clash of personalities and interests, deftly conveyed through the dialogues. Narender sometimes becomes poetic while describing

2. Ibid, page 124

tender moments as when Bapu of Phoolan narrates about age-old bonds of the boat-people with the village people.¹ He also makes use of pun, as when Rasia says that in that case he is not Sasur (Father-in-law) but asur (demon)² or again when, Phoolan says; 'I am Phoolan alright, but not a Phool (flower)³, or further, 'Phoolan has not picked' 'Phool' (flowers) with these hands but rowed the boats.⁴ But there are moments when one feels that Narender had been influenced by the silver screen in writing such plays.

'Tand Je Trutti Gandhi Laini Ho' is essentially a Radio play, although with minor modifications it can be a one-act stage play. The play deals with an idyllic situation.

In the beginning the situation develops into a love triangle, but towards the end, matters get sorted out and the play ends on a happy note. Characters and situations are drawn with sympathy and understanding.

The resolution of the conflict in the play 'Tand Je Trutti Gandhi Laini Ho', is too idealistic. There are not many intense and dramatic moments or situations. The descriptions and dialogues are impressive at places, but the overall impact has been watered down because of idealistic conception. What redeems the play is the language, the effective use of crisp dialogues, full of irony. Another one-act play 'Aitwar Di Sair' (Sunday Outing) brings out the contradictions in the human character and depicts them in a witty manner. The plot of the play is thin and the situation is also trivial but Narender's genius for depicting the humorous and funny aspect of life makes his 'Aitwar Di Sair' a truly memorable short-play in Dogri⁵. A newly-married couple has decided to spend a Sunday in summer at the canal side. But before they can leave, visitors drop in; the couple now decides to spend the afternoon in a cinema hall. The husband brings two cinema tickets but meanwhile, an old girl friend of his wife has come to their house.

1. Rasta, Kante Aur Hath Page 96

2. Gehri Nadiya Ki Dhar.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Dogri Sheeraza-Ekanki Ank-Published by Cultural Academy, Jammu Page : 92,93,98,99,105-106.

house. Her visit creates a happy atmosphere and they decide to spend Sunday by remaining with their guest at their place.

To these bare details, Narender brings a dramatist's touch. By the dramatic use of language, ironical and humorous dialogues and comic situations, he greatly enlivens the atmosphere. Characterisation is very fine. The characters of Diwakar, the husband; Uma, the wife; Dukhiya, the writer and Master Ji, the teacher—with their idiosyncrasies—and Prem, the girl-friend of Uma, are all nicely drawn.

There are two other short plays, 'Apne Paraye' and 'Hijrat' (Migration)¹ which are published along with three other one-act plays of Narender Khajuria.

'Apne Paraye' deals with two sets of people: A young couple belonging to the higher caste and having the same sub-caste as that of the 'Mard' and 'Janani' of the play, get true support and sympathy not from them but from another couple who are Harijans. The dichotomy between appearance and reality, between false sympathy and real sympathy is the central point of the play. There are some attractive dialogues and some rapier-thrusts of irony and satire. Otherwise, not a very good play.

'Hijrat' (Migration) is more like a scene than a one-act play, depicting the situation of Bawa Jitto and his young daughter, preparing to leave their native village, Ghaar, in search of a new haven after having been forced to leave by Jitto's relatives.

All this amounts to a substantial contribution to the genre of Dogri stage and radio plays at a time when the output in this field was rather meagre and very few people were contributing to it.

1. *Apne Paraye* - published by Dogri Santha, Jammu, 1975.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Narender Khajuria was a conscientious writer, responsive to the requirements of a literary movement that wanted to create literature in Dogri in different genres. There was little literature for the juvenile around 1960 except for some published folk tales and translations of *Baital Pachisi* and stories from the Bhagwat. The publication of *As Bhag Jagane Ale Aan* was in response to felt needs, not only of a growing Dogri literature but also of the village boys who happened to be the author's students. This need had been whetted by the staging of Dogri play *Nama Gran* (New Village) at Chowki Jandrodh where Narender was teaching and the curiosity of the students who acted some parts of the play and wanted more plays. Seven short plays written to meet their need were collected and published in the first collection of Dogri one-act plays for children in the early sixties. They serve the twin-purpose of entertainment and instruction for the children. All these plays had been staged at Chowki Jandrodh, and also in the nearby school of Ramnagar Tehsil by school children. These plays show Narender not only as a good writer of Dogri who has full command over his language but one who is conversant with stage-craft and its potentialities, not only to provide a visual spectacle to the audiences but also to shape their minds.

These plays also show Narender's deep commitment to his teaching profession and to the method of education of children through the medium of stage plays. There is an attempt here, not only to motivate young children to study more of Dogri literature, but also to inculcate in them the spirit to work hard and regularly, the spirit of camaraderie and adventure and the spirit of service and sacrifice. This has been done by creating interesting situations, clever twists and humorous dialogues. The psychology of the children has been taken into account and the themes have been chosen judiciously, sometimes dipping into the treasures of Dogri folk tales and sometimes borrowing from the developments of contemporary life. The intention in all case is to enthuse and inspire

the young children, through the enactment on stage and drive home a lesson or a positive value.

'Buddhoo Ram' shows that even a so-called stupid student as Buddhoo Ram can erase the poor impression about himself by working hard and securing the first position in his class.

'Sadha Sathi, Sadhe Sanjhi' tells children that there may not now be much in common between the jungle beasts and the pet animals, but the latter are certainly great friends of mankind.

'Jago Te Jagao' gives us a glimpse of the School Parliament where children enact the roles of leaders and ministers. The young students of today rehearse the roles which some of them will play in the national affairs in the days to come. There is implied criticism of the tardy implementation of national policies and a subtle suggestion for cutting down the inordinately large team of ministers who do nothing practically and make only long speeches. The children who exhibit courage and bravery by saving the lives of other children in distress are lauded and rewarded.

'Columbus De Sathi' gives a new twist to the contemporary scene. Columbus discovered a new continent of America, although he set sail to discover India. Kuldip Sharma and Sharat run away from their homes in search of new avenues where their spirit of service and adventure can find full scope for its expression; and though they have to remain without food and face difficulties in the way, they succeed, through the presence of their mind, in unmasking the seamy world of the gang of child-lifters who aim and cripple them in order to thrive on the collections made by them (the crippled children) by making them beg in the streets and bazars. And they help the police to burst the gang. They are also like Columbus and his companions of yore, who discover the sordid world of thugs and criminals and bring about the rehabilitation of the maimed and crippled children. A new order, where there is equality and justice, can be created by rooting out the perpetrators of injustice in our society.

'Trai Matbanne' exhorts the children not to live on the false hopes of becoming rich after being adopted by their rich relatives. Instead, they should rely on their own efforts, study hard and shun day-dreaming.

'Angreji Bhoot' is based on a fact. Shanker, a student of Narender, stops coming to school. He finds lessons in English difficult to understand. Instead of facing humiliation in the class, Shanker pretends that he is possessed by an evil spirit. Narender comes to know of the real problem and decides to tackle it. He meets Shanker, encourages him to share secret with him and assures him to solve his problem by coming to his house as an expert who drives the evil spirits away. And this he does. Shanker is now 'cured' of his disease, and through hard work, he succeeds in passing the examination and is promoted to the next higher class.

'As Bhag Jagane Ale Aan' is also about the school children. It deals with the problem of a student, Mohan, who stammers and develops inferiority complex. Other students tease him and he avoids them. But another friend of theirs, Ramesh, advises them against this. They become friendly to Mohan. Mohan too reciprocates their sentiments. They strive for a common goal, for all of them are the harbingers of a better tomorrow. The author makes good use of Dogri, clever and lively situations, witty and humorous dialogues, sometimes full of irony and satire and interspersed with some purposeful songs. It is not, therefore, difficult to imagine that *As Bhag Jagane Ale Aan* proved to be an instant success as children's literature, and was given the first prize by the Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages as the best book of the year in Dogri in 1961.

True to his commitment to cater to the needs of the children for entertaining literature in Dogri, Narender came out with another book in Dogri: *Rochak Kahaniyan*, a collection of thirteen short stories. The objective behind these stories is to imbue young students with the spirit of patriotism, courage and bravery, adventure and enquiry, and also to widen their horizon—both social and mental. The author, therefore, chose his main characters, the surroundings and the problems¹ from among his students. This at once made his stories realistic as well as purposeful.

The characters of the stories are children themselves and the themes are their problems or values and attributes which can be helpful in shaping their outlook on life and their characters. And

1. Introduction to *Rochak Kahaniyan* by Narender Khajuria

the handling of the themes and solutions to problems show the author's understanding of child psychology.

The story 'Mohan Te Sohna' shows if a situation is tackled with love and understanding by the elders, the children respond readily.

'Do Bhrah' is a modern version of Ali Baba and Forty Thieves where in Ali Baba is replaced by the two youthful brothers, who become instrumental in getting arrested a gang of decoits by their courage and presence of mind.

'Kamal' is a story combining some of the elements of Narender's two famous stories 'Phull Bane Angare' and 'Inami Kahani' written and published earlier. He depicts in this the pathetic situation of a bright but poor and helpless boy who has to face many an odd to continue his school education.

'Tarak' is the story of a Bakkerwal boy who retrieves his he-goat from the forest at the dead of night, without caring for the cold or the so-called evil spirits. A song in the story reinforces Tarak with courage. Why should he be afraid? God has made him a man and endowed him with both strength and wisdom. He reaches back his place after an encounter with a bear and a tiger and shooting each one dead.

'Sachi Lagan' is the story of a cow-herd boy, Prakash, who lived in a hilly village with his old and partially blind grand-ma. But his desire to acquire education and his commonsense provide him with an opportunity to study in a school. Through sheer hard work and merit, he passes M.A. He could have got a good post commensurate with his qualifications, but he decides to return to his village and teach the orphans and indigent villagers so that with the light of his knowledge, he could shed away the darkness of his village folk.

'Jade Di Sair' 'An Outing in Forest' contains some useful tips for the study of natural history, and also deals with the courage of the three school-going friends, and their encounter with a bear.

Badri and Krishnoo, the two brothers expose the misdeeds of Ramdass of their own village, who masquerades as a 'ghost' and demands the choicest things to satisfy his hunger. They relieve the

whole village of their fear of the evil spirit. How they do it is the theme of the story 'Bhoot'.

'Notai Di Chori' deals with the psychology of children. Sometimes when their smallest requests are not met, they are driven to fulfil them through theft. Sham wants a ten-rupee note to keep it in his 'shop', like his friend Omi has, but his father refuses to oblige him. He is, therefore, tempted to pilfer it from the coupon in which his mother had kept it. Their servant is to bring the flour with it from the ration shop. But neither of his parents suspects the theft on Sham but both blame their servant- boy, Mundu, and thrash him also. Sham has ultimately to admit the theft, to the utter shock of his parents.

'Gupha De Qaidi' is a story of adventure and suspense but the adventure and suspense take place in a dream seen by Neeloo. Now we do not doubt the veracity of a dream so long as we sleep, but the truth dawns on us when we wake up. One of the explanations of the dreams is that they are the manifestation of our sub-conscious or suppressed desires. Neeloo too wants some thrill of adventure but is too lazy to move out. Hence he undergoes that adventure in his sleep.

Children are sometimes the cause of quarrels among their elders but in the story 'Aao Kahani Sunche', Noor and Dev bring about peace and amity between their two estranged families by their bold and common-sense approach, and also do a good turn to the whole village by removing the basic cause of enmity between them — by donating that piece of land for the new school building.

'Bhahadur Mohan' is the story of a brave boy who makes the bear run away because of his courage and common sense.

In 'Anmol Ratan', Narender tells his readers that truth and honesty are not mere terms to be lauded in public but practised in real life. And this invaluable lesson is conveyed by the example of a young boy who buys rags and old news-papers. Honesty demands no reward or return; it is a reward in itself.

Amrit wants good pen to write the answers in his examination, but his father, being poor, cannot afford to buy him an expensive pen. Amrit finds one in his street but when he knows that it belonged to his friend Rasul, he returns it to him. On seeing

the happy look on Rasul's face, Amrit's joy and satisfaction are greater than the joy on Rasul's face.

The language in both the books is conversational and idiomatic, with appropriate expressions used for creating the right effect, describing a situation or delineating a character. The style is mostly dramatic and the characters of the protagonists and antagonists are brought out through dialogues. By clever turn of phrase, a character or a situation is brought alive by Narender. He is fond of similes and metaphors, and some of his similes not only exhibit his deep observation of things but heighten the literary effect of a passage, a scene or a story. Narender, a teacher, acted as a philosopher, guide and friend to his students in real life. And the master in some of the plays of *As Bhag Jagane Ale Aan* and *Rochak Kahaniyan* is none other than Narender himself. He inspired his students to study, to work hard, to imbibe in themselves the spirit of service and sacrifice and to pen down their ideas by taking a leaf out of his example.

The two books are indeed a valuable contribution to original children's literature in Dogri.

POETRY

Narender Khajuria was not known to have written any poetry during his life time. It was only after his death in 1970 that Ram Nath Shastri, while rummaging through Narender's papers, discovered some poems scribbled in his hand. These poems were edited and published by Dr. Ved Kumari Ghai in *Narender Darpan* in 1975. These poems are poems of personal sentiment and are remarkable for their imagery and ideas and off-beat topics. In 'Zahar', he tells of poison that one must drink to live a purposeful life. This poison is the pain and suffering of life which open the gateway to knowledge and wisdom, a life-giving element. He had perhaps a premonition of his death and in a poem called *Basiyat* (The last will), Narender forbids his writer-friends to write anything over his death. He was an ordinary man, a writer who had nothing except sheets of paper on which he had scribbled his ideas and thoughts. In the present day society, such papers are worthless. When some one picks up his pen to write on someone else, it seldom tells the truth. And he had been an ordinary individual and whenever he picked up his pen, he tried to use it in his quest for truth.

In 'Surjai Di Pehali Kiran' Narender, through the tactile quality of his imagery tells us how each day appears to be like a rock, unwieldy and giant—like. He reduces it to smithereens with the hammer-like blows of his hard labour, and yet the next day and the day after this process continues in an unending fashion. Despair and despondency which is personal as well as that of an artist or a writer is all too visible in the poem.

In 'Badal Bardha Nein', he speaks of the suffocation he feels; it is like the formation of the clouds which never come down in the form of rain.

In 'Qaidi' he tells his readers that life is like an imprisonment even though we are without any shackles or iron chains. The home, the daily routine—these are our prisons.

In 'Mere Malko', Narender indicts those persons who pretend to be feeders of the poor and the customers of songs and tales. They are the persons who wield political or economic power and have the capacity to distribute favours to their favourites or those who oblige them in kind. Even he has written his songs and stories at their behest and they have been made-to-order for them. It reminds the readers of Narender's short story 'Kavita Da Ant', where Kavita has to write her poems on demand by her husband. People, in order to win false glory, either pretend to be good literatures and connoisseurs or patrons of art.

In 'Je Kaden Mein Mein Honda', like his 'Mere Malko', Narender gives expression to his suppressed feeling of having had to do things against his better judgement or real will. If only he could muster his real strength, if he could only become his real self, the real he. In that case, he would not have had to sell his pen to others; he would have fought for the just rights of the oppressed.

In 'Nakare Lok' (Useless People), he exposes people who are concerned more with the exteriors of things than with their inner reality. In the absence of beautiful colours, how is it possible to get the real shine or glow?

Narender sometimes says cruel things because he has seen the hypocrisy so common in our attitude and behaviour. Even man and his intellect cannot win honour and security for him. How much better it would have been if we were the human apes, and thus playing the circus tricks, we could excite others, wonder and win their respect.

There are two versions of 'Khushi' (Happiness). Happiness is not something which is sold in the market; it is like the underground water which comes to the surface drop by drop after penetrating through or breaking the boulders.

In 'Bhare Bajaren' (Crowded Streets), Narender depicts the world of hurry and flurry where human beings, particularly the writers and artists, are lost in the madding crowd, like the young child who gets lost in a crowded locality.

The poems give the impression that Narender knew that he was not going to live long. Did he really believe in what Bhagwat Prasad Sathe, the writer of Dogri short stories had told him that he

would die young? It was perhaps this nagging feeling of the impending death that impelled Narender always to be on the move, to keep writing something that would immortalise him. It was his conscious effort to leave something which could perpetuate his memory. For death can only eliminate us physically; it cannot destroy our creations, our works of art and literature. Death does not cheat life; it is death which is cheated instead. Life with its perennial stream continues flowing. And how could a writer die—how could Narender die—when he could give shape to his ideas and imagination? Ideas and imagination never die. Life never dies.

'Maut' (Death) creates terror only among the weak and the cowards; it cannot frighten the brave. It gives them a slip like a timid boy who is afraid of facing the mischievous or the roguish boys.

'Kaden' (If) is, like 'Mere Malko', 'Je Kaden Mein Mein Honda' and 'Zindgi Mardi Nain' partially autobiographical. Narender is conscious of his role and his place as a writer but he must keep renewing himself. The creativity must never be allowed to die, otherwise the writer or the artist would have also to face, like the flower-bearing plants and trees, the winter of barren ideas. It is the constant struggle to go on doing something, never to sit idle, which gives meaning to the life of a creative artist.

In 'Kodh' (Leprosy), Narender mercilessly lays bare the hypocrisy in human life. Man disguises his feelings in many ways; he puts on many masks to conceal his real face. But when the real test comes, he exposes himself, and acts what he really is and not what he is trying to look like. It is the Ravan in us which comes through us and not Ram, because we are like Ravan, adept in concealing our real identity and real intentions. The symptoms of leprosy on our body or body-politic will be out, no matter how hard we may try to hide them.

In 'Kinne Fi Sadi Mahnu' Narender again exposes the human mind and its behaviour as he has done in his 'Kodh'. Man has not one face but many faces, and there are many layers of his self, like the many layers of a rubber ball of tennis, which bounces according to the force and strength of the shots hit by the player.

'Bhunchal' (Earthquake) reminds one of Charan Singh's 'Daun Keengre'. Both deal with the failure in love in retrospect. But whereas Charan Singh's poem depicts the quickening tempo of the desire and the frustration of the youthful lovers, Narender's poem describes the sentiments of a mature lover for whom the feeling of love was not like a fever but an earthquake under which everything is buried, and nothing comes out alive. It is like a dead body which, with the passage of time becomes fossilised; which does not send shooting pain through one's self but leaves one numb with pain.

In 'Avtar' he questions why Lord Krishna is called an incarnation of God? Because he made brothers fight each-other? Lord Krishna knew that man asks searching and inconvenient questions, and, therefore, to silence such questions, Lord Krishna advised Arjun (and through him the mankind) to do his duty regardless of the reward. But the poem remains incomplete. Narender seems to have run short of ideas, but he leaves a question mark on our minds.

'Tu te Mein' (You and I) depicts the dichotomy of our social behaviour. We only disguise our real selves and act like decent people although we know the deceit and fraud which we commit on each-other. This is the tragedy of today's man who, in order to save himself, only deceives himself.

In 'Kish Nain' (Nothing Remains), Narender once again comes to his favourite theme of death. He chides his detractors and so-called friends, and exhorts them to treat him kindly, speak to him pleasantly, recognise him while he lives. It is no use to write reminiscences or his biography when he is no more. Life is so long as one lives. (Who cares whether somebody garlands his picture after death?) For, who lives if we die? Time and again, Narender is haunted by the double standards of our society, and he would not spare even himself because he too was a part of this society.

In 'Gandhi' also he exposes human behaviour. We are only too keen to deify Gandhiji and then forget all about him and his teachings and deeds. But he was not meant for fasts and hunger strikes. He was a person who was always in search of truth, who experimented with truth. But where is the truth, what is the path of truth? A writer worth his salt must always strive for truth. He knows that it is not an easy path, but then as an honest writer, he

must try hard, because he is not alone on this path. There are others who too, like himself, are in search of the truth.

Narender has not written many poems, only about 30 and none of them is a long poem. His poems do not have the fine flashes or the spontaneous outpourings of Madhukar, Charan Singh or Padma, nor the sustained development of ideas as in Deep or Shastri nor the natural descriptions as in Ram Lal Sharma or Almast, nor the sonorous quality of Shambhu Nath nor the satire of Dinoo Bhai Pant nor the song-like quality of Yash Sharma or the metrical skill of Krishan Smailpuri. But they have a rhythm of their own. They are marked by the fine blend of ideas and emotions, some honest searchings for truth, for the deeper realities of life and death, of pain and failure and frustrations, of the hypocritical ways of the world where one has to act one's feelings and sentiments without betraying one's real emotions. We get a glimpse of Narender's preoccupation with the theme of death and his constant and conscious effort to beat death in his own game, by leaving something permanent and everlasting in his writings. His poems bear ample testimony to it because they reveal a new and modern out-look on life with its disturbing complexities.

ESSAYS

Narender tried his hand even in writing essays in Dogri. Although their number is not large, they show him as a master of prose style, of humour and analytical skill.

In 'Tk Safar Suhana' Narender treats the subject of an old man's obsession with learning driving even at the cost of making a fool of himself, in a lighter vein. There are moments when the reader feels that Narender is deliberately giving an exaggerated account of incidents in order to make the situation more mirthful. Some similes are either inept or none-too-pleasing but the reader is prepared to accommodate Narender's point by 'willing suspension of disbelief', and thus enjoy the description of situations, howsoever unnatural or contrived they may appear to be. To use a soft drink as a substitute for water when the car engine becomes heated is less than commonsense. But then such a description can certainly be amusing.

'Meri Diary De Do Patter' gives in a mock-serious manner the background of Narender's humorous short story 'Meri Sassu Di Maut urf Yoq khandit' (Death of my mother-in-law). In the story, Narender brings out in a style peculiarly his own, how much we are bothered about the externals of a situation rather than the reality itself even if we may or may not be genuinely feeling grieved over the death of our near or dear ones. The present case concerns the death of his own mother-in-law, and custom required that the son-in-law must cry loud and shed big tears in public to express his grief.¹ It also deals with some superstitions that impending trouble to a person can be avoided if it is falsely announced that that person is dead.

Narender's essay 'Meri Kahaniyen De Patter'² should be read in conjunction with his 'Kinna Sach, Kinna Jhooth', which is in the form of an Introduction to his short stories contained in his Shaitya

1. 'Meri Diary De Do Patter' Sheeraza Vol 4, 1970.

2. Dogri-Sheeraza, December 1964.

Akademi Award winner, *Neela Amber*, *Kale Badal*. Narender in this essay shows insight into the characters of his stories. He shows that he knew precisely what he wanted to create in his short stories, (for that matter, in his other writings) what types of people or situations affected or influenced him, and he wanted to preserve them in his writings. Narender's analysis of his own feelings, the perceptive approach which he adopts in the case of his characters, the economy of detail, the conversational ease and idiomatic style of his language, wit and humour, tinged with an element of sympathy and understanding for his characters, are all present in the above-mentioned essay.

Along with his Editorials, these essays form a valuable contribution of Narender to the genre of Essay in Dogri.

AS AN EDITOR

The Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages was publishing its literary journals in Kashmiri, Dogri and Urdu under the title Sheeraza. When it decided to publish a similar journal in Hindi, Narender Khajuria was selected as its first editor by a high-powered selection Committee chaired by the then Sadar- Riyasat, Dr. Karan Singh. He left his job of a teacher in the Shri Ranbir Higher Secondary School and joined the Academy in early 1965 and brought out the first issue of the journal in April 1965. He was very successful as an editor and the secret of his success lay in hard work, a pragmatic approach to problems, a friendly attitude towards contributors and colleagues and the printing press people and very informal, chatty editorials. He sought views and opinions of all the readers and contributors and raised basic questions. What should be a good journal like? What does a reader expect from a good journal? What does a reader expect from a good journal? What are the limitations of the Editor, the limitations of the press, the quality of the material and the standard of the contributors.

In a simple but effective style, without sounding grandiose, he took the readers into confidence and invited their suggestions, criticism and co-operation. The approach in the editorials was friendly to the extent of appearing informal, always welcoming suggestions to improve the quality and standard of Hindi Sheeraza. Here and there, one could also see Narender, the writer. Hindi Sheeraza was intended to serve the twin-purpose of projecting the best writing in Hindi in the J&K State, and providing a forum to writers in Kashmiri, Dogri and Punjabi etc. to reach out, through the medium of Hindi, a larger number of readers living in different parts of the country. Another purpose was to invite the leading writers in Hindi to send their literary, creative or research papers for publication in Hindi Sheeraza. The aim was to provide, as far as possible, a reasonable level of excellence in the literary, cultural or artistic fields. Narender performed the Editor's job quite competently.

The real judgment about a journal and its standard can be made not by the Editor himself but by its readers and contributors and the scholars and critics. From that angle, Hindi Sheeraza soon carved out a distinct niche for itself. The comments of Dr. Vasudev Aggarwal, Acharya Kishori Dass Vajpayee Dr. Harivansh Roy Bhachhan, Smt. Tara Tikku, Shri Premnath Dhar, Sh. Ramdhari Singh 'Dinkar', Dr. Siddheshwar Verma, Dr. Ram Kumar Verma, Shri Shamas-ud-din and Shri Ram Lal, all from outside the state proved that Narender had been able to make 'Sheeraza' a literary and research journal and his efforts as its editor had been successful.¹

Although Narender was the Editor of Hindi Sheeraza, he also edited some issues of Dogri Sheeraza and some Dogri publications of the Academy. He was basically a writer in Dogri. He was his natural self when it came to writing in Dogri. Apart from his command over Dogri, he had a capacity to marshal his resources whenever he had to write on any topic or issue. This would become clear if one glances through the three special numbers of Dogri Sheeraza, one each on Gandhi, Ghalib and Bhasha (Language), *Nau Kahaniyan*, *Satt Natak* and *Phull Chameli Da*. There is a clarity of thought, marshalling of arguments and felicity of expression in the editorials he wrote, also the sense of arranging the material in an intelligent and attractive manner. Unlike Madhukar, who was the Editor of Dogri Sheeraza even at the time Narender edited the above-mentioned special numbers and publications, Narender was always ready to come out with his views in his editorials.

1. Narender Smarika - 1972, Dogri Sanstha, Jammu.

SUMMING UP

It is slightly over twenty years since Narender Khajuria breathed his last. It is not a very long period to afford a perspective for evaluation of his contribution, but not so short either that one is not able to define the salient features of his contribution to or his standing among the living and the dead writers of Dogri.

But how is one to evaluate Narender as a writer and his contribution? As a short story writer or a play-wright? a novelist? a poet? an author of children's literature? as Editor of Dogri Folk Tales and Songs? as a writer of essays, both personal and literary? Narender was each one of these and a combination of them all.

The nineteen fifties were the years of expansion and development of Dogri literature, and its different genres. Before 1950, the number of writers and their publications was lamentably small, and much of literature was written in verse. There was thus a need to produce Dogri books in large numbers and enrich Dogri by adding new genres, like short story, novel, play-scripts, essays, both personal and literary. Dogri Sanstha, the premier literary organisation of the Dogras had been urging the writers regularly to add to the volume of Dogri literature by writing not only poetry but prose, short stories, plays, novels, essays and the like. As a writer, Narender was conscious of his responsibility towards his mother-tongue and, therefore, he wrote not only short stories, but a number of one-act plays in Dogri (and also in Hindi) for the stage as well as for the radio, two full-length plays, *Rasta*, *Kante Aur Hath* in Hindi and *Dhaundiyan Kandhaan* in Dogri. He also wrote one novel, *Shano*. Narender was one of the first to realise the importance of the saying 'Catch them young'. And, with this end in view, he wrote short stories and one-act plays for children. As *Bhag Jagane Ale Aan*, a collection of one-act plays and *Rochak Kahaniyan*, a collection of short stories were the first two collections of children's literature written by him in Dogri. In addition, Narender Khajuria wrote about thirty poems and a number of

essays, and edited a couple of collections of short stories and folk songs.

His contribution, therefore, in building up the corpus of Dogri literature at a juncture when there was a great need for addition to the existing genres and writing in new ones, is indeed significant. Dogri short story was still in its infancy when Narender Khajuria appeared on the Dogri scene with his first collection of short stories *Kole Diyan Leekaran* in the late fifties. Before him, Bhagwat Prashad Sathe's *Pehlla Phull*, (The First Flower), a collection of short stories had been published in the previous decade, and Lalitha Mehta had published her collection of short stories, entitled *Sui Dhaga* (The Needle and the Thread) in the mid-fifties. Sathe had a conversational style and wrote in chaste Dogri, but a majority of his stories appeared to be based on folk beliefs and historical episodes. His stories did have a singleness of purpose but suffered from a lack of proper plot-construction. Lalita Mehta's stories depicted the socio-domestic scene in spoken Dogri, but her approach to the problems was too simplistic. Ram Kumar Abrol, Ved Rahi and Madan Mohan were his contemporaries in short story. Abrol seems to have been influenced by Urdu short story, and his style was rather heavy. Ved Rahi exhibited greater awareness of technique and the treatment of some of the themes of his short stories, included in his first collection *Kale Hath* (Black Hands), was quite impressive. Madan Mohan, in his short stories in the collections *Kheerla Manu* made use of the psychological approach. Narender Khajuria did not have the strength of Ved Rahi in so far as the technique of short story is concerned nor the psychological probing of Madan Mohan. This is quite evident from the stories included in their later collections. Even the younger writers like Bandhu Sharma, Om Goswami, Chhattarpal brought new ideas and techniques to the Dogri short story. And yet, Narender justly occupies a special place among the Dogri short story writers because of the economy of expression, judicious use of the right words, an intimate knowledge of, and a genuine concern for, the downtrodden people living in the hilly areas of Ramnagar Tehsil who are constantly exploited by the Shahs and the Bajhiyas (the money-lenders and the landlords). His command over Dogri was masterly and few could use the idiomatic language and the turn of phrase as effectively as Narender did. A large

number of his short stories are immensely readable, and they are justly famous for some of their memorable characters, like Bhagan and Murku, Rami and Faqiroo, Premu and Meeru, Kastu and Saddhro Dai, the Nani (maternal grand mother) of 'Ik Samhal', the hero of 'Ik Patta Patjhar Da' or some of the child-characters of his *Rochak Kahaniyan*.

As a writer, Narender had a streak of idealism which becomes evident from time to time in his short stories and plays. This streak is quite pronounced in his novel *Shano*. There are weak and contrived situations in the novel; quite a few characters are studies in black and white. And his solution to the problems is also simplistic at times. Even the end of the novel 'Bhatt Chanain Hi (the path was all bright in the moon light)' seems to be too facile. But in spite of all this, there is an admirable use of language and an authentic depiction of the social realities in the hilly areas of Ramnagar Tehsil. The Shah and the Bajhiyas, with their limitless greed and cunning become alive before our eyes. We can witness the struggle of Shano and Shankar to lead a life of dignity. Shano wins both our sympathy and admiration. The element of reform is also quite pronounced in the whole story. 'There is nothing which a man cannot do if he really wants to,' is the message which Narender tried to give in his novel *Shano*.

Narender has acquitted himself creditably in his Hindi play *Rasta, Kante Aur Hath*. He shows sound knowledge of theatre and its various techniques. His Dogri play *Dhaudiyan Kandhaan* though comparatively a weak play too has some purple patches. The wit and repartee are present in it in an adequate measure. His one-act plays and Radio-plays, both in Dogri and Hindi, show that not only did he write plays in good number but in good style. His dialogues are short and crisp, and the situations in many of the one-act plays are full of dramatic possibilities.

Basically Narender wrote in prose, but he also practised his hand in poetry. Though there is not the breadth or depth of some major poets of Dogri in his poems, he did write some good experimental poetry and expressed his ideas and emotions for which he did not think his prose to be an adequate medium.

He experimented in free verse. Much of his poetry is the poetry of personal experience, full of introspection. We find in his

poetry his preoccupation with the questions which have been baffling mankind from his first appearance on this planet, the questions of life and death. There is, no doubt, a lack of verbal melody or a certain spontaneity, but quite a few of his poems have a capacity to tease us, even to shock us, and push us back to the realities of life with all its complexities and ironies. Narender was indeed one of the earliest writers of new poetry in Dogri.

Narender was both a conscious and a conscientious writer. He tried to do in literature what he sincerely felt should be done in and through literature. Art or literature for him was not only a medium for self-expression or a means simply to entertain his readers; it also meant that he should educate his readers through it. It is for this reason that we find some studies of black and white characters, idealised situations and their solutions in his short stories and his novel *Shano*. The same holds true of his literature written for children. It is worth remembering that hardly any Dogri writer has done as much in the direction of producing Children's literature as Narender. In fact he was the pioneer of children's literature in Dogri.

Narender collaborated with me in compiling volume 6 of Dogri Folk songs. *Datta*, a translation of Sharat Chander Chatterjee's Bengali novel of the same title, is the result of the joint efforts of Jitender Sharma and Narender Khajuria.

The essays in prose like 'Ik Safar Suhana' 'Meri Diary De Do Patre' or 'Meri Kahaniyen De Pattar', and the Introduction to his collections of short stories show Narender not only as an elegant writer of wit and humour, irony and satire in Dogri, but also as a keen observer, who tried to probe the working of the human mind and explain its many intangibles. His styles of writing is intimate, chatty and informal. And style is the man, they say. There is an easy flow and grace in his prose style. He seems to observe everything in a keen manner, and uses the right word for the right situation to convey the slightest shades and nuances.

His contribution as the first Editor of Hindi Sheeraza is recognised by the lovers of Hindi. He also edited a few numbers of Dogri Sheeraza. Narender also provided the story for the first and so far the only film in Dogri: *Gallan Hoeyan Beetiyan*. Not many writers in Dogri have written in and left their impress on so many

genres of literature. And yet Narender never felt complacent over his achievements. He only halted but never stopped in his pursuit of literary creations. He was always busy looking out for new themes and new plots, new pastures and new fields, and new characters and styles. The very fact that Narender was not fully satisfied with his achievements is indicative of the measure of excellence which he wanted to attain. In his own words, "I like those of my stories which I have not yet penned down—only their basic outlines I have jotted down in my diary; I am not yet feeling myself competent enough to put them down in writing. Similarly, I cherish those characters who have yet not been made prisoners of my pen"¹.

Dr.S. Radhakrishnan, a former President of India as also of the Sahitya Akademi has written 'Indian literature is one though written in many languages'. Dogri also forms a small part of the great Indian literature. By contributing his share to enriching Dogri literature and its different genres, Narender contributed indirectly to the building up of the corpus of Indian literature. Within a short span of about fifteen years, he produced a considerable body of literature not only in Dogri but in Hindi. He had won the first Jammu & Kashmir State Cultural Academy award for the collection of his one-act plays for children, entitled *As Bhag Jagane Ale Aan*, and was the first recipient of the Sahitya Akademi award posthumously for the collection of his Dogri short stories *Neela Ambaer Kale Badal*. He was in the very prime of his life when he died in April 1970, but by his writings he has carved out a permanent niche for himself in the field of Dogri literature. He can justly be called as one of the makers of modern Indian literature.

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